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# Articles in Today's Clips

**Friday, July 18, 2008**

(Be sure to maximize your screen to read your clips)

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Friday, July 18, 2008

## Toddler's heat death called 'tragic'

### Green Oak cops investigate how girl was left in pickup with windows closed on 88-degree day.

Francis X. Donnelly and Candice Williams / The Detroit News

**GREEN OAK TOWNSHIP** -- A playhouse and swing set in the backyard of a spacious home in this Livingston County community sat unused Thursday.

A day after heartbreak, the only sound coming from the well-manicured lot was silence.

Left unanswered was a question troubling neighbors and relatives of Brian and Laura Stouffer: How does a parent leave a child alone inside a pickup for more than two hours?

Alyssa Stouffer, 18 months old, died Wednesday after being discovered on a sweltering day that reached 88 degrees.

"Why did you leave her in the truck?" Britany Borden, a sister-in-law of Laura Stouffer, wondered aloud.

Brian Stouffer, 29, had driven to an unknown place with his daughter and then left her in the 2004 pickup after parking in the driveway of their home, police said. The windows were up and the ignition was off.

The baby wasn't discovered until Laura Stouffer, 26, returned home from work late in the afternoon and couldn't find the child. She tried to apply CPR to her child, who wasn't breathing.

Green Oak Township police said they didn't know why Stouffer had left his daughter in the vehicle.

Borden said she was desperate for answers.

"I don't know why he would do anything like that," she said.

No criminal charges have been filed as police continue an investigation. Police Chief Bob Brookins said Thursday the distraught couple has been cooperative.

The police are trying to learn what Brian Stouffer was doing before and after his daughter was left in the vehicle. They also want to determine how long the baby had been there.

An autopsy showed Thursday that the preliminary cause of death was hyperthermia. The time of death won't be determined until a toxicology report is finished.

"It's certainly tragic," Brookins said. "This can happen anywhere, anytime."

The Stouffers have another child, a 3-year-old boy, who wasn't home at the time of the incident, police said. The boy apparently was at day care.

It wasn't clear what the Stouffers do for a living. Laura Stouffer was a skin care expert whose license expired in 2006, according to public records.

A review of law enforcement records showed that Brian Stouffer had a single speeding ticket.

Meanwhile, with temperatures reaching the 90s Thursday and expected to do the same today, health officials are warning residents about heat-related injuries.

This summer 16 children in the United States have died from hyperthermia after being left in vehicles, according to San Francisco State University.

In one of the latest cases, a Clarksville, Tenn., mother left her 3-month-old daughter in the car while she went to a bar. The 24-year-old mom has been charged with first-degree murder in the July 8 death.

As for the Green Oak death, neighbors said they were flabbergasted by the tragedy.

"I don't understand that type of accident," said Gail Lamkin, the mother of a 10-month-old girl. "Who doesn't know not to leave a child in the car?"

Other residents were more sympathetic.

Ed Baeckelent, who lives next door to the Stouffers, said the death resulted from a horrible mistake.

He didn't know the family well but felt that Laura Stouffer was a good parent.

"We see them in the backyard and the mother taking care of them and playing with them on the swing set," he said. "Good mothers do that sort of thing."

*You can reach Francis X. Donnelly at (313) 223-4186 or [fdonnelly@detnews.com](mailto:fdonnelly@detnews.com).*

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<http://www.detnews.com/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=/20080718/METRO/807180387>

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# Child's death is reminder of dangers of heat

## Livingston Co. toddler was left in hot truck

By LISA ROOSE-CHURCH • LIVINGSTON DAILY PRESS & ARGUS • July 18, 2008

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An 18-month-old Livingston County girl is the first child to die of hyperthermia this year in Michigan after being left in the family's pickup in sweltering heat for more than two hours.

### ADVERTISEMENT

Some neighbors, including those who do not know the family, left cards and notes at the family home Thursday morning. Some said they simply can't imagine what the family is going through and what the toddler experienced.

"I think it's sad," neighbor Ed Baeckelandt said. "I believe they should be left alone."

Annette McMahon, whose daughter stood next to her, said for those neighbors who do know the family, the loss is deep and unthinkable.

"Our prayers are with them. It's just a tragedy," she said.

The 26-year-old mother discovered her toddler unresponsive and overheated shortly after 4:30 p.m. Wednesday in the family's 2004 Ford pickup parked in their driveway on Riviera Court in the Lakeside Estates subdivision, off 10 Mile Road, near Rushton Road, in Green Oak Township near the Livingston County line.

Also home at the time were the toddler's 29-year-old father and 3-year-old brother.

The mother, whom police did not identify, and emergency workers' administered cardiopulmonary resuscitation to no avail.

Police Chief Robert Brookins said the toddler was in a car seat in the rear driver's side of the father's four-door pickup, which had its windows up, for "more than a couple hours."

"During that period of time, both parents had been at and away from the home, but one parent was always home, and both were present when the child was discovered," Brookins said. "The truck was in the driveway of the home, and its

<http://www.printthis.clickability.com/pt/cpt?action=cpt&title=Child%27s+death+is+reminder+of+dange...> 07/18/2008

windows were rolled up, and was not running when the child was found."

"There's nothing to believe it was done on purpose," he added.

Temperatures soared to 88 degrees throughout the afternoon with the humidity averaging about 45%, according to a meteorologist at the National Weather Service's White Lake Township office.

Jan Null, an adjunct professor of meteorology with San Francisco State University's Department of Geosciences, said that within 10 minutes, the temperature in the car was likely 107 degrees. After an hour, the temperature could have been as much as "125 degrees to 135 degrees easily," he said.

It was not immediately known how hot the child became. Experts say core temperatures of 107 degrees are lethal.

The Green Oak Township toddler is the first hyperthermia death in Michigan this year and the 17th nationwide. She is the sixth hyperthermia death in the state since 1998, Null said.

On average, 36 children die in the United States of hyperthermia in a vehicle each year, Null said.

## **Medical effects**

Heat is much more dangerous to children than it is to adults.

"A child's body heats up three to five times faster than an adult," Null explained.

A vehicle's interior warms as the sun shines on objects — including a child — which gives off heat and heats up the car, Null explained. A dark dashboard or seat, for example, can easily reach temperatures in excess of 180 degrees, he noted.

These objects, including a child seat, heat the adjacent air and give off long wave radiation, which is very efficient at warming the air trapped inside a vehicle, Null said.

"Cracking the window has little effect," he noted.

The most common cause of death when a child is left in a car is hyperthermia, which is also known as heatstroke.

Heatstroke occurs when a person's temperature exceeds 104 degrees and the body's thermoregulator system is overwhelmed.

Heat exhaustion in younger children can produce symptoms such as fuzziness, lack of normal responses, severe thirst, vomiting, initial excess sweating and a high temperature, according to St. Joseph Mercy Health System.

In older children who can talk, they may act confused, complain of a headache or have any of the aforementioned symptoms. In the beginning stages of heat exhaustion, a child will sweat a lot but then may become cool and clammy as the body's systems are affected by the elevated temperature of the body.

A core body temperature of 107 degrees is considered lethal, as cells are damaged and internal organs shut down.

"In very hot weather, it is important to drink lots of cool liquids," Lauren Stokes, a spokeswoman with St. Joseph Mercy Health System, said. "At area outdoor activities, like sporting events and fairs, it is important to get into shade and to drink plenty of fluids. Temperatures inside a car increase exponentially on a sunny day, even with the windows open, so it is important not to stay in a car on a hot or sunny day."

At the first sign of heat exhaustion, a person should begin cooling measures by providing fluids. Also, immediately seek emergency help.

## State law lacking

Null said only 14 states have laws prohibiting leaving a child unattended in a vehicle. The remaining 36 states — including Michigan — lack such laws.

In Michigan, there are general child abuse or child neglect laws as well as manslaughter or murder charges that could address the situation of a child who dies in a hot vehicle, but none that specifically address leaving a child unattended in a vehicle.

However, state Rep. Mark Meadows, D-East Lansing, and Rep. Fran Amos, R-Waterford Township, hope to change the law.

They have introduced legislation — House Bills 4872 and 4873 — that would prohibit a person from leaving a young child, defined as a child age 6 or younger, unattended in a vehicle for a period of time that posed an unreasonable risk of harm or injury.

HB 4872 would add a new section to the penal code that would prohibit a person responsible for the care of a child from leaving that child unattended in a vehicle for a period of time that posed an unreasonable risk of harm or injury to the child. It would apply to leaving unattended a child less than age 6. Unattended is defined as "alone or without the supervision of an individual 13 years of age or older who was not legally incapacitated."

HB 4873 states leaving a child unattended in a vehicle causing serious physical harm would be a felony with a maximum penalty of 10 years in prison. Leaving a child unattended in a vehicle resulting in death would be a Class B felony, which is punishable by up to 15 years in prison.

Both bills passed the House and have been referred it to the Senate Judiciary Committee.

"The bill is about protecting our most precious resource — our children," Meadows said in a news release.

Whether the Green Oak Township parents could face criminal charges was not known.

Brookins said he would submit his department's report to Prosecutor David Morse's office, which is typical in a death investigation.

Morse was not available for comment Thursday.

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# Hill Center employee charged in sex case

## Female staffer is accused of having sex with student

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KEVIN GRASHA • AND DEREK WALLBANK • JULY 18, 2008 • FROM LANSING STATE JOURNAL

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A 32-year-old staff member at Lansing's Hill Center who students turned to for help with their problems is accused of having a sexual relationship with a male student that lasted two years.

Carrie Alice Denbow of Meridian Township faces seven counts of third-degree criminal sexual conduct and one misdemeanor count of domestic assault. The felony charges involve allegations of sexual intercourse and oral sex. The misdemeanor assault charge stems from a reported December 2007 assault and battery.

Denbow, who was arraigned Thursday in 54A District Court, faces up to 15 years in prison on each of the criminal sexual conduct counts.

The student, who was 13 to 15 years old at the time, is a ward of the court, according to statements made in court. The Lansing State Journal does not identify reported victims of sex crimes. According to the charges, the two had a relationship between January 2006 and December 2007.

In her \$28,100-a-year position as a student assistance provider at the Hill Center, Denbow helps students with anything from problems in the classroom to problems at home. The Hill Center is home to the district's vocational and alternative high school programs.

Denbow has been on paid administrative leave since Dec. 3, 2007, following the accusations that she had an inappropriate relationship with a student. She has worked for the district since January 2001, officials said.

On Thursday, Judge Amy Krause released Denbow on a \$25,000 personal recognizance bond, which means Denbow does not have to pay any money up front.

As part of the conditions of bond, Krause ordered Denbow not to have any contact with children under the age of 18 and not to be within 500 feet of the victim.

"You need to stay away from him, entirely," Krause told Denbow.

Denbow, who appeared on a video monitor during the arraignment, said only a few words when answering Krause's questions. She occasionally shook her head and expressed disbelief.

Her attorney, Frank Reynolds, declined to comment, citing a gag order issued by Krause. Ingham County Assistant Prosecutor Guy Sweet and Reynolds requested the gag order during the arraignment.

A preliminary hearing, which determines if the case advances to trial, is scheduled for July 25 before Judge Charles Filice.

Lansing school board President Hugh Clarke Jr. said Thursday that the accusations are "certainly every parent's and every administrator's worst nightmare."

"The district is in contact with our attorneys, and they will guide us through the process, in terms of the next step," he said.

Superintendent T.C. Wallace Jr. said Denbow remains on paid administrative leave.

Wallace said the district will look into the accusations against Denbow, adding the investigative process is "not necessarily tied to what the legal system is doing."

"She is an employee until there is a determination to the contrary," Wallace said.

The Board of Education would ultimately decide Denbow's job status, looking for proof she violated either the public trust or district policies, Wallace said.



Officials said having sexual relations with a student is prohibited on both counts. Wallace said Denbow can request the hearing be public or kept behind closed doors.

"She is entitled to be heard on the allegations, just as with any hearing before the board," Wallace said.

Wallace said the student is still enrolled at the Hill Center, adding that district officials have not revealed his identity to teachers or staff.

Wallace said district officials are taking the charges seriously, but stressed that such accusations are rare in Lansing.

"I consider this situation a severe breach of the public trust on behalf of a staff member," Wallace said. "This is an anomaly, this sort of allegation is not very common in our school district."

Former Hill Center teacher Al Rios, who was laid off in October, said he knew Denbow only as a fellow professional.

"You're surprised to hear something like that," he said of the charges.

"As far as, did I suspect it or see anything to make me suspect it? No."

# Murder convict, still pleading innocence, is scolded by judge

## Waterford man called coward, gets life term

BY L.L. BRASIER • FREE PRESS STAFF WRITER • July 17, 2008

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A Waterford man convicted last month of murdering his wife insisted again in Oakland County Circuit Court on Wednesday that she committed suicide, prompting a sharp rebuke from the judge.

ADVERTISEMENT

"I tried to help her ... her drug use is what caused her death," Edward Stenberg, 57, told the court as he stood shackled in orange jail garb waiting to be sentenced to life in prison for fatally shooting Laura Stenberg, 46, last September in the couple's Waterford home.

Oakland County Circuit Judge John McDonald, clearly disgusted, shook his head and said: "I don't believe one word you're saying. You have no conscience. You are a coward."

Stenberg continued to argue.

"You weren't there," he told the judge.

McDonald told him to be quiet.

Stenberg, who has a long history of assault, fled Michigan shortly after shooting his wife once in the head on Sept. 7, prompting a manhunt over several states. He was found three weeks later, bicycling in the Florida Keys.

At the time of his arrest, Stenberg was wearing a backpack that held a loaded .22-caliber handgun, a 9mm handgun, knives and a stun gun. Stenberg's wife was shot with a 9mm handgun, police said. Stenberg did not resist arrest.

In a June trial, Assistant Prosecutor Lisa Gorcyca told jurors that Stenberg was an abusive husband who had threatened other women in the past; a controlling man who ultimately killed his wife because he was angry.

<http://www.printthis.clickability.com/pt/cpt?action=cpt&title=Murder+convict%2C+still+pleading+inno...> 07/18/2008

Murder convict, still pleading innocence, is scolded by judge

Just five months before Laura Stenberg was killed, her husband was released after serving 10 months in the Oakland County Jail for hitting her with a blackjack.

During Wednesday's sentencing, Laura Stenberg's sister, Denise Knight, said Laura lived in constant fear of Stenberg and that her family and friends regretted not doing more to help her escape him.

"He beat her, he shackled her, he bound her down, he shot her in the head," Knight said, struggling with tears, as a calm Stenberg stood almost nonchalantly across the courtroom. "He is an evil monster."

Contact **L.L. BRASIER** at 248-858-2262 or [brasier@freepress.com](mailto:brasier@freepress.com).

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<http://www.freep.com/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=/20080717/NEWS03/807170418>

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## Dad gets prison for abuse

Posted by [Danielle Quisenberry | Jackson Citizen Patriot](#) July 18, 2008  
09:23AM

Kirk Coleman, an Army paratrooper who served in Iraq, did for Americans what he could not do for his child, a Jackson County judge said Thursday.

"You failed to protect your own daughter," Circuit Judge John McBain said Thursday before sending Coleman to prison for attempted child abuse.

McBain, nearly tripling the maximum penalty that state guidelines recommended for the charge, sentenced the 27-year-old to 3 1/3 to five years in prison for injuring his baby daughter in August and September.

He said the extent of the girl's injuries, which included nearly 20 broken bones, injuries to her private parts and brain bleeding, inspired him to stiffen the penalty. State guidelines called for zero to 14 months in prison; the maximum penalty for the offense is five years in prison.

"This case is one of the most horrible I have ever seen," McBain said. "The reality is, but for the grace of God, (the girl) would probably be dead."

The story of the baby inspired community protests and outrage.

Coleman's lawyer, Dennis Hurst, who earlier accused McBain of having a bias toward Coleman, said the judge relied more on emotions than facts when he sentenced Coleman.

He said Coleman, of Columbia Township, would appeal McBain's sentence.

Coleman, who has been portrayed by the defense as an honorable Iraq war veteran, pleaded guilty May 29 to attempted first-degree child abuse, admitting he repeatedly and accidentally hurt his daughter while drinking and taking a drug. She was 3 months old at the time.

"I'd like to apologize," he said Thursday, with a row of his family members sitting behind him. They declined to comment.

"I am responsible and I want to take full responsibility for my role in this," Coleman said.

He initially was charged with first-degree child abuse and first-degree criminal sexual conduct and was facing a possible life sentence.

Prosecutors later agreed to a plea deal, saying they feared an acquittal would allow Coleman partial custody of his daughter, who is now 13 months old.

Conflicting opinions of medical experts cast doubt on whether the baby was sexually assaulted, Assistant Prosecutor Allison Bates said at the sentencing.

There also were questions raised about whether Coleman was the sole perpetrator.

Hurst implicated Coleman's wife, Ashley Rogers, who has filed for divorce, which is pending.

Bates said Rogers, who did not attend the sentencing, was "put through the ringer" by the state Department of Human Services and passed a polygraph test.

"There is no indication that she was the perpetrator of these injuries," Bates said.

Rogers' mother, Deborah Rogers, has custody of the baby; the girl lives with both her mother and grandmother in North Carolina and receives almost daily therapy as she is suffering "severe psychological disabilities," Bates said.

Coleman takes responsibility for the injuries the girl suffered during the four accidents he described in May. Before the plea hearing, he said he did not remember those injuries occurring.

He said in May that she fell out of her bouncer as he carried the chair and hit her head on a plastic bottle as he opened the refrigerator door. Two other times, he tripped on a rug or cord while holding her, he said at the plea hearing.

Thursday, he called himself a "drunken father" and apologized for failing to immediately get the girl medical treatment, but said he would not be held accountable for all her injuries.

A doctor testified at a preliminary examination the girl had 17 fractures, bruises and contusions around her jaw and face.

All the injuries could not be caused by the four accidents Coleman described, Hurst said.

Hurst presented McBain with a long document that included copies of Coleman's Army achievements while he served with the North Carolina-based 82nd Airborne Division from 2003 to 2006. It also included supportive letters from family members and Coleman's pastor and employer.

The letters lauded Coleman as a humble, quiet man of character.

Bates said the court did not have to limit its consideration to what she called Coleman's "disingenuous recitation of the facts."

Said McBain: "There are few things as defenseless in the world as an infant child," McBain said.

# Suspect sought in trail sexual assault

Friday, July 18, 2008 \

BY ROBERTO ACOSTA  
racosta@kalamazoogazette.com

388-8557

BLOOMINGDALE -- A 13-year-old girl was sexually assaulted Thursday evening while stopped during a bike ride on the Kal-Haven Trail, police said.

Van Buren County Sheriff's Office deputies responded to a call at 6 p.m. The girl told police she was riding and had stopped for a break when a man came from behind her and knocked her to the ground, a press release from the Van Buren County Sheriff's Office said.

Police said the man covered the girl's mouth and eyes with his hand while he assaulted her. She was able to scream, and the suspect ran into a wooded area.

A K-9 unit from the Sheriff's Office was able to track the man to Walnut Street in Bloomingdale but could not locate him.

The girl was taken to LakeView Community Hospital, in Paw Paw, for treatment. The suspect is described as having a thin build and wearing a dark shirt and jeans. The victim told police he has pale skin and dark or brown hair.

Police are asking anyone with information to call the Sheriff's Office at (269) 657-3101, Silent Observer at (866) 774-2345 or Crime Stoppers at (800) 342-7867.

## Convicted murder Dena Thompson called 'cold-hearted, evil' at sentencing

Posted by [jhaywood](#) July 18, 2008 14:15PM



Press File PhotoDena "Winky" Thompson

ALLEGAN -- A judge this afternoon sentenced Dena "Winky" Thompson to life in prison for the Dec. 3 killing of her ex-husband, Troy Tyo.

A friend reading a statement on behalf of the victim's parents said Thompson had lost everything.

"You lose all the way around," the woman said, addressing Thompson while she and Ron and Jane Tyo stood together in the back of the courtroom.

The victim's widow also spoke.

"Dena Thompson is a selfish, cold-hearted, evil individual," Kathy Tyo said.

She said Thompson's life was filled with "anger, hatred and financial problems," and added that her only tears were for herself.

Allegan County Circuit Judge William Baillargeon sentenced Thompson, 39, of Gobles, to the mandatory sentence of life without parole for first-degree murder.

She wanted custody of their daughters, ages 6 and 10, and convinced her new husband, Kristofer Thompson, to kill Tyo, trial testimony showed.

Tyo, a Perrigo worker and volunteer Allegan firefighter, was stabbed to death and left in his truck, which was set on fire, according to testimony.

Kristofer Thompson awaits trial for murder. His sister, Lori Lathrop, awaits sentencing after she pleaded guilty to being an accessory after the fact, while her husband, Scott Lathrop, who alleged drove Kristofer Thompson to Dumont Creek Estates mobile-home park, where Tyo lived, awaits trial for assault and conspiracy.

In videotaped police interviews, Dena Thompson admitted she got her husband to kill Tyo. She did not take part in the killing.

Defense witnesses portrayed her at trial as a peaceful, reputable woman who volunteered at schools in Allegan and Gobles. The prosecution considered her manipulative.

In videotaped recordings, Thompson denied having her husband kill Tyo, but eventually told a sheriff's detective: "I wanted Troy taken out of the picture. ... To be gone for good."

When Detective Patrick O'Reilly asked how, she said: "I guess to be killed."

[More coverage of the case](#)



Categories: [Breaking News](#), [Dena Thompson trial](#)

## Comments

**rick5205** says...

As a cost savings, why not impose sentence at the time of conviction when the judge's only choice is life without parole? I know the family gets to speak, but it sure seems like a bunch of extra expense when the outcome is a forgone conclusion.

Posted on 07/18/08 at 2:40PM

Footer



July 18, 2008

## Police: Man kidnaps, kills wife in Oceana Co. woods

### Morning update

*Associated Press*

FERRY TOWNSHIP, Mich. - Police in western Michigan are searching for a man they say was wearing camouflage and face paint when he broke into the home of his in-laws, kidnapped his wife at gunpoint, took her into some nearby woods and fatally shot her.

Radio station WKLA in Ludington says the woman was forced from the home in Oceana County's Ferry Township about 8 p.m. Thursday. Her body was found about three hours later.

Police dogs and helicopters are part of the search about 50 miles northwest of Grand Rapids.

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# Suspect found dead after wife's slaying

Friday, July 18, 2008

## FROM LOCAL AND WIRE REPORTS

Authorities say the hunt for an Oceana County man who abducted his wife from a home on 160th Avenue Thursday and then shot her to death ended around daybreak this morning.

The body of the 41-year-old man was found in a wooded area after an all-night manhunt.

Oceana County Sheriff's deputies responded just after 8 p.m. to a home on 160th Avenue near Buchanan Road after the husband -- reportedly dressed in camouflage clothing with his face blackened -- abducted his wife at gunpoint.

The 28-year-old woman was at her mother's home, where children also were present. Just after 11 p.m., police found the wife's body in the woods not far from the residence. Residents in eastern Ferry Township and in the Hesperia area had been advised to stay inside their homes behind locked doors during the hunt for the suspect.

The search for the woman and her husband involved Oceana authorities, state police, emergency response teams, police tracking dogs and a helicopter that aided with a searchlight.



# 3-year-old boy dies after table hits him in the head at Flint daycare center

Posted by Kristin Longley | The Flint Journal July 18, 2008 14:19PM

**FLINT, Michigan --** A 3-year-old boy died today after a cafeteria table fell on his head at a local daycare center.

The Flint boy was playing in the gymnasium shortly before 11 a.m. at Little Characters Child Care, [3020 E. Dupont St.](#), near a table that was folded into the wall. When he bumped the wall, the table fell on him, said Flint police Sgt. Roderick LeGardye.

Little Characters operates inside St. Mark's Missionary Baptist Church and school. But police said the church does not operate the daycare.

The boy, who police did not identify, was taken to Hurley Medical Center with severe head injuries and died about an hour later, LeGardye said.

The other children at the daycare center were sent home.

Police are continuing to investigate the incident, but do not suspect foul play.

Little Characters received a child care license in December from the state Department of Human Services. The license allowed applicant Robert Thompson of Grand Blanc Township to operate with up to 24 children from as young as 6 weeks old.

The Flint Journal could not immediately reach Thompson for comment today. His license was renewed by DHS just last month, according to state records.

The day care facility was last inspected by the state on June 16.

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# Settlement serves state's children

DETROIT FREE PRESS  
JULY 18, 2008

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Gov. Jennifer M. Granholm directed me to hammer out and negotiate the successful agreement with the New York-based Children's Rights organization in the best of interest of the state. This agreement puts children first. It reflects the shared goals of improved safety for children, stronger supports for those who care for them, and more promising outcomes for their future.

Investing in children is the right solution for Michigan's long-term child welfare reform plan. This plan focuses on spending money to invest in children and reform the system, not wasting taxpayers' money on costly attorney fees, court costs and potential fines.

Prior to the agreement, the Michigan Department of Human Services had already initiated new reforms that continue to invest in children. These include, but are not limited to, the following: a consortium of Michigan Schools of Social Work to research, evaluate and train social workers in the child welfare system, public-private partnerships to enhance child welfare services, and a task force dedicated to developing measurable outcomes for foster care, adoption, juvenile justice, and homeless and runaway youths.

Nevertheless, this successful agreement protects Michigan's statutory obligation to safeguard vulnerable children by allowing the state to have a voice in the pace and direction of reforms. The state was able to select an independent monitor who understands the complexities of child welfare practice and government practice that preserves the executive authority to run the department.

Michigan taxpayers are also protected in this agreement. Attorneys estimate that continuing the case in court could cost up to four times more than what it will take to improve the child welfare system. With this agreement, we

anticipate investing \$50 million annually over the next four years. If this case went to trial, we could have spent as much as \$1.5 billion in that same four-year period.

Finally, this agreement represents and honors the tireless efforts and outstanding commitment of our partners, advocates and fine state employees to ensure that every child in Michigan has a safe, loving and permanent home. Their continual investment in children is priceless.

**Ismael Ahmed**

*Director, Michigan Department*

*of Human Services, Lansing*

## **Some Mich. child support recipients will owe fees**

7/17/2008, 5:44 p.m. EDT

The Associated Press

LANSING, Mich. (AP) — Michigan officials will start charging some child support recipients a \$25 annual fee.

Starting in September, the fee will be assessed in all child support cases where the custodial parent has never been on welfare and has received at least \$500 in support during a one-year period.

State officials said Thursday the fee is required by federal law.

The fees will go to the federal government and state government to offset the costs of operating child support programs.

The average amount of child support received annually by parents who will pay the fee is \$5,600.

Michigan will deduct \$25 from families' next child support payment after they have gotten at least \$500.

Michigan Department of Human Services News Release

Contact: Colleen Steinman (517) 241-5678

## **\$25 fee levied against child support payments**

*Fee mandated by federal legislation*

July 17, 2008

Beginning in September 2008, some child support recipients will be required to pay an annual fee of \$25 to comply with a new federal law.

The Federal Deficit Reduction Act of 2005 requires this fee on all child support cases where the custodial parent has never received cash assistance and the family has received child support of at least \$500 during a one-year period. Most of the proceeds from the fee (66 percent) will be sent to the federal government to fund child support programs in Michigan and throughout the nation. The state of Michigan will retain the remaining third of the fee to offset the state costs of operating its program.

"We have no choice but to abide by the federal law," said Marilyn Stephen, director of the Department of Human Services' Office of Child Support. "We are grateful that the federal authorities created a lifetime exception for families that have received assistance in the past because child support is the safety net that keeps many children out of poverty."

Michigan will deduct the \$25 fee from the next child support payment after the first \$500 has been sent to the family. The average amount of child support received annually by parents who will pay the fee is approximately \$5,600, so the fee represents less than half of one percent of the total amount of child support received during a given year.

Working together, county prosecutors, friends of the court and DHS Office of Child Support staff provide valuable services to families. Key among these services are notices sent to employers every time a non-custodial parent starts a new job. The notice requires that child support be consistently withheld from the parent's wages. Last year, \$1.4 billion was collected for families through income withholding and other means of collections.

Michigan collected \$6.38 for every dollar spent to administer the program during fiscal year 2007, which demonstrates the program's commitment to provide efficient and effective service to children and families in the state.

For more information, please go to [www.michigan.gov/childsupport](http://www.michigan.gov/childsupport)